

Amendments to the Specification:

Please add the following new paragraph at page 1, before the paragraph beginning at line 4:

This application is a U.S. National Phase Application under 35 U.S.C. § 371 of International Application No. PCT/CA2004/000620 filed April 27, 2004, the text of which is incorporated into the present application by reference.

Please replace paragraph [0027] with the following amended paragraph:

The same procedure was repeated with another sample of NiCl_2 pre-dried at 170°C in air. Nickel extraction of essentially 100% was obtained in about one hour as illustrated by curve C in the graph of ~~Fig. 3~~ FIG. 2.